



Lesson 13

In Christ, Everything Has Changed. Romans 8.1-17

“ However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you...”

Romans 8.9

Our Need For A New Spirit

We are spiritual beings. Yes, we have a physical body, but the real person is spirit, not flesh. It's biblical to say that the “real you” is a spirit, just note these parallels found in Scripture:

- The spirit is synonymous with heart. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.” (Psalm 51:17) Note also Exodus 35:21 and Hebrews 4:12.
- The spirit is synonymous with mind. “Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;” (Philippians 1:27)
- The spirit is the inner man. “that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,” (Ephesians 3:16). Note also Romans 7:22.

Gnostics in the 2nd and 3rd centuries perverted this truth to justify sinful practices in the flesh, reasoning that since we are really spirit, then any sinful activity is a product of the flesh and has no effect on the spirit. However, the Lord made clear that the sinful actions of our flesh originate from our inner man, “But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.” (Matthew 15:18–19)

The importance of man being a spiritual being reaches back to the Creation account. In Genesis 1's abbreviated account of man's creation we see that man was created in God's own image (vs. 27), but in the fuller account of chapter 2 we see just how man was made in His image: “Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being,” (vs. 7). God, who is Spirit (John 4:24) breathed spirit into man. Being created in God's image has moral implications, for just as God is holy, righteous, faithful, etc., so was man who was created in His image. Thus, everything God created was “very good” (Gen. 1:31). Yet, as we know man did not remain very good. Because of his sin, unholy man was separated from holy God. The very nature of God's creation had changed!

We have noted this horrific change in our study of Romans. The gospel is needed because “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (3.23). The glory of God is His very nature that we have failed to uphold and emulate. We were once created in His very image, but we have come to be defined by sin and death, we have all become part of the epoch of Adam, “just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all

men, because all sinned.” (5.12) We, each of us, needed a new spirit. Significantly, God promised that when His Spirit came His people would be given a new spirit: “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances,” (Ezekiel 36:25–27).

At the close of chapter 7 Paul lamented on his failures to keep God’s will while he belonged to Adam’s age (i.e. before he was a Christian). “I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” (7.23-24). The answer was/is Christ. Chapter 8 expounds on that answer showing the complete transformation that occurs in Christ, including the new spirit that God had promised through Ezekiel. The age of Adam is over for the Christian. Everything has changed.

No Condemnation For Those In Christ Jesus (vss. 1-4)

Romans 8:1–4 (NASB95)

1Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

2For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

3For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh,

4so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

1. The epoch of Adam was one of condemnation. Condemnation because all were guilty of sin (3.23; 5.18). Condemnation because none kept God’s Law. Condemnation because all were deserving of death (6.23). But, in Christ everything has changed.
2. Paul could exultantly proclaim that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” This is the theme for this entire passage, the changing of order, the great change that has occurred in Christ. First, Paul states that “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.” Many question what the two “laws” are in this passage, but the best option would be to take up what Paul described in 7.22-25 where there was the “law” of Paul’s mind that wanted to serve God, but the “law” of sin in Paul’s flesh prevented that and won. But in Christ, everything has changed. So, “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” refers to the Christian’s ability to finally follow the Law of God, i.e. the law of my mind finally wins, while the “law of sin and of death” refers to the former reality of being unable to follow God, to succumbing to the flesh time and again.
3. What brought about this change? That is the subject of vs. 3. The Law (of Moses) did not, it could not. Again, Paul emphasizes that the failure was not with the Law, but with the flesh. To remedy this, God sent His own Son (in the flesh, no less). His perfect life in the

flesh and His death condemned sin! What man could not do, even with the Law, God did through His Son!

4. The result is that “the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us.” God’s Law was something that was to be kept (2.13), something Paul desired to keep, but failed to keep (7.22-25). But now because Christ’s death “condemned sin in the flesh” (vs. 3), it is now possible to walk according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh. Paul will later state that “the mind set on the flesh” cannot please God, cannot subject itself to His law (vs. 7-8), but those who’s minds are on the Spirit are in fact led by the Spirit. Simply put, those in Christ have entered a new epoch characterized by life, righteousness and the Spirit. They can now follow and please God.

The Spirit Of God In You (vss. 5-13)

Romans 8:5–13 (NASB95)

5For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

6For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,

7because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so,

8and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

9However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

10If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

11But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

12So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—

13for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

This passage describes the grand transformation that occurs in Christ. Whereas we were once characterized by flesh, we are now characterized by Spirit. But what does this mean? I have found it helpful to look at groups of similar terms: (I am indebted to David McClister in coming to a better understanding of this passage. I heartily recommend his essay “Sealed With The Holy Spirit” found in Blessed Be God: Studies in Ephesians.)

Group 1:

- The Spirit (vs. 9)
- The Spirit of God (vs. 9)
- The Spirit of Christ (vs. 9)
- Christ is in you (vs. 10)

Does Christ literally live in you? I don’t know many people who think that, but Paul’s use

of these terms show that the Spirit can be used synonymously with God and Christ. Perhaps we get caught up with the idea of the Spirit dwelling in our body, when in reality the Spirit is said to dwell in our spirit (2Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 3:17). However, the point here is that to have the Spirit within us is to have the Father and Son as well.

Group 2:

- Walk according to the Spirit (vs. 4)
- The mind set on the Spirit (vs. 6)
- In the Spirit (vs. 9)

To be “in the Spirit” is not to have the Spirit invade you and take over. It is to be guided by the Spirit, to make the Spirit’s ways our ways. Our walk (manner of life) is now one that follows the Spirit, rather than the course of this world. This does not happen without my concurrence, but by setting my mind on the Spirit rather than the flesh.

Group 3:

- The Spirit of God dwells in you (vss. 9, 11)
- Have the Spirit of Christ (vs. 9)
- Christ in you (vs. 10)
- Led by the Spirit of God (vs. 14).

What does it mean to have God’s Spirit dwell in me? It’s the same as having His Spirit lead me! To put it simply, it’s not God’s Spirit dwelling alongside my spirit, it’s my spirit being conformed to God’s Spirit! Consider again the promise in Ezekiel 36:25-27, “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.” The “new spirit” God would put within us is His Spirit! This idea is conveyed throughout the New Testament in 2Peter 1.4; Ephesians 4.22-24; 2Corinthians 3.17-18.

Paul’s overall point is simple: the requirement of following God, of keeping His will was impossible when we were characterized by the flesh, but now that we can be characterized by His Spirit, now that our spirit is being molded into His Spirit, we can follow Him! There is truly no condemnation for those in Christ, those who’s spirit is His Spirit. Everything has truly changed!

Vs. 10-13 offer an application of this grand theme. Those who have the Spirit working within them have the assurance of the resurrection of their earthly bodies, these bodies that continue to die. If the Spirit works so powerfully within us, molding our spirits and promising the resurrection to come, why would any of us live according to the flesh? No, the works of the flesh must be put to death if we are to live in the Spirit!

The Sons Of God (vss. 14-17)

Romans 8:14–17 (NASB95)

14For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

15For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a

spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,

17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

1. Those who are still characterized by the flesh have a relationship with God based on fear. He is their Creator, but nothing more. He is the One who will judge them, whose wrath they will experience. But in Christ, everything has changed.
2. Our relationship is that of adopted sons, those who can approach God as their Father. We can do this because of the working of His Spirit along with our spirit (again the idea that our spirit is being transformed in the likeness of His Spirit. The family resemblance, if you will).
3. Now, instead of fearing wrath and condemnation, we have become fellow heirs with Christ. This will necessarily involve suffering (the world has always hated God and will hate those who belong to Him), but the pattern of suffering and glory that occurred in Christ will also occur in us. More is said of this in the next lesson.